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Challenging Art: An Interview with Italian Artist, *Biancoshock*

Biancoshock

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Abstract

Milan-based socially engaged artist, Biancoshock (a pseudonym the artist prefers to use), was kind enough to take time out of his schedule to answer some questions for SAH Journal. We wanted to know more about his diverse, and often provocative urban art projects; as well his time spent travelling and creating in different parts of the world. So far in his career, Biancoshock has realised more than 800 “interventions” on the streets of Italy, Albania, Belgium, Croatia, France, England, Malaysia, Malta, Norway and Singapore, to name but a few. While he exhibits widely, he has also participated in numerous urban art festivals (Citileaks, Memorie Urbane, Stencibility). In 2014, he presented his work at TEDx Oporto, Portugal.¹ Biancoshock places social activism high on his list of priorities, using art as the mediator for a worthwhile and necessary conversation between each individual who encounters it. By choosing unconventional sites for the creation of his art, and involving those spaces in intimate and challenging critiques, Biancoshock infers his questioning more seriously towards society and the centrally politicised - perhaps overly polished - contemporary art world.

The full array of Bianoshock’s projects can be found at <http://www.biancoshock.com/>

“For me it is essential to enter into contact with different cultures – it is a part of my art.”

- *Biancoshock*

Keywords: Biancoshock; Italian art; Street art, Ephemerals, Activism, Social practice (Art), Society, Culture.

¹ “Bio”, (2016, October 10). Retrieved from <http://www.biancoshock.com/bio.html>



From Biancoshocks 'Borderlife' series. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Q. 'Biancoshock' is not your real name. How does anonymity add to your art, activism and public persona?

A. My anonymity is a provocation: for me the most important things are my projects, my artworks, my activism. The idea and the message are more important than my face and myself.

I don't love to show my face on social networks or on the web, not because I want to seem like a mysterious artist, but because I think that the focus has to be on my Art, and not on my person. Too many 'VIP' artists in this period are often more important than the figure of the artist. The focus is on his promotion, his personality, and not on his art. Really strange period.

Q. In *Web 0.0*, you are making a point about communities' engagement and communication through social media networks. Do you believe that social media negatively impacts people and real communities?

A. The aim of my project is to stimulate people to think about a social aspect: I don't want to give a personal opinion but suggest a reflection. Certainly social media has changed people and their habits, society and communities, but if used in the correct way, it can be a good tool to stay connected and interact with people that live in other parts of the world.

In *Web 0.0*, I just wanted to show how all the social tools of the internet/web applications already exist in real life. In this small village of 600 citizens that don't have Internet connection, they don't know the meaning of these tools.



"Web 0.0". Image courtesy of the Artist.

Q. You largely describe your art as ephemeral- creating installations and works that exist for short periods of time. Why is ephemeralism important to you? Where do you feel permanence in art resides?

A. It's important because Ephemeralism is the essence of my artistic adventure. When I decided to give a name to my urban activism (that in my opinion is not street art) I realized that Ephemeral was the adjective that better described a lot of the aspects of my activity. So I decided to use Ephemeralism as definition.

My art is ephemeral in real life, as one intervention could be live for 2-3 hours, 3 days, in any case for a really short period; but at the same time, it can be live forever through photo, video, exhibition, and the web. For this reason, photos and documentation are really important.

Q. Does your work highlight our tendencies towards social compartmentalization? I.e. are we ignoring too many things in our environments? In consequence placing importance on the wrong things?

A. I think we probably live in a society that doesn't give the correct attention to environments and the importance of environments. Probably globalization doesn't help us to maintain some important values and ideals. But as I've said, my aim is only to suggest these kinds of reflection: I'm not conceited and I don't want to make judgments or propose solutions. What I can do and I want to do is to offer food for thought, and communication opportunities to a heterogeneous public.

Q. For your Borderlife series, you converted manholes into small dwellings in Milan, Italy, in an effort to create dialogue regarding the homelessness epidemic in Europe. Can you talk about the development and realization of this project, and what it meant to you?

A. This project was born as I was affected by what I saw in Bucharest: 600+ homeless people living in manholes. A lot of these people die in manholes everyday, as rats.

Everyday other citizens walk on the streets without considering that under their feet there are people who are constantly suffering in terrible silence. This shocked me and then I decided to create three installations, reproducing three different rooms of a house.

“If some problems cannot be avoided, make them comfortable” - I used this as a description - a provocative sentence to invite people to open their eyes to this kind of daily tragedy.



From the “Borderlife” series: Installations created in manholes on the streets of Milan. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Q. Movement and travel is predominant in your life as an artist. There seems to be an underlying message in your process regarding the global community, and the limitations and/or impact of borders. Can you elaborate on this?

A. Movement and travel for me are important because each place in the world is different in terms of culture, history, problems, environments, etc.

For me it is essential to enter into contact with different cultures – it is a part of my art.

Obviously is not easy because my art is independent and self-financed, but I always try to travel and realize urban intervention in different cities, demonstrating that some ideas, messages and problems can be understood across the world, because they are lived and experienced by all people.

For me borders are stupid conventions: my art is for everyone, without borders or limitations.

Q. You have been called an “urban interventionist”. What does this mean to you?²

A. For me definitions are not important. In the first period of my artistic adventure I didn't consider myself an 'artist', let alone a 'street artist'.

I can say that certainly I'm an urban activist that works mainly on the street, with the aim of offering a little 'shock' to the public viewer. My art is public, and my public is the common people.

The rest for me is not important.

Q. What is the ultimate goal with your art?

A. To kill my personal anxiety; to stimulate common people to think about some social problems; to demonstrate that creativity is free, and that is in the DNA of us all, and that it is not a gift from God. Everyone can find his/her way to be active and alive: society wants us to be passive and silent. It's time to react.

Q. What are you working on right now?

A. I'm working on different projects. I'm not able to stay concentrated on only one project.

Certainly the most important project at this moment is the project I'm doing with Harmen de Hoop, one of the pioneers of urban art, and an example for me. I'm really proud to have the honor to work with him, and we are doing a really interesting project. (www.biancoshock-dehoop.com)

Q. Studies in Arts and Humanities Journal is an open access, peer reviewed journal that brings together work by undergraduate and postgraduate students alongside that of academics. How do you feel about your Art being included in this context?

A. I'm glad, because my art is not for conventional galleries or boring exhibitions. My art is public; it is directed to the common people, to the passerby, the clerk, the unemployed, the students and the retired.

I just hope to be able to stimulate some young minds to start to create something new, with a potential message, not only for business or economic purposes, but to demonstrate that we can do everything just with our ideas.

References

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² Reed, Martyn. (2016, October 10). Retrieved from <http://www.biancoshock.com/the-crystal-ship.html>